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ABSTRACT

The learning resource teacher serves in a variety of modes (including assessment, intensive individual instruction with specific learning disability students, and provision of advice and/or materials to teachers). The role of the learning resource teacher is much broader than that of the remedial specialist in that she is a catalyst in the development of resources and materials, in the use of volunteers and tutors in the schools, and in the exploration of new methods of service delivery and instruction. The classroom teacher is the key to the ultimate success of any intervention and must retain responsibility for the student's progress. The goal, then, of the learning resource system is the enhancement of the teacher's skill to handle basic instruction well and to deal with learning disabilities and other exceptionalities as they develop, with the support of the learning resource teacher. (Author/SBH)

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THE LEARNING RESOURCE MODEL IN A SCHOOL SYSTEM

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THE LEARNING RESOURCE MODEL IN A SCHOOL SYSTEM

Madeline I. Hardy, Ed. D.

PHILOSOPHY OF LEARNING RESOURCE PROGRAM

Traditional Delivery of Special Services

Services for students with special needs have been provided by some Canadian school boards since shortly after the turn of the present century. The first publicly-supported special classes were commonly established for students classified as 'educable mentally retarded' and were, in some places, referred to as 'auxiliary classes' While special services grew slowly during the first half of the present century, since about 1950 a variety of types of service has been established, in response to the needs of a changing society's children and youth.

Many school boards have a well-developed special services program and staff, working in a number of distinct and specialized areas. The delivery system of special services is a complicated one, as the needs of any individual student, almost without exception, demand the attention of more than one of the divisions of special services. Appendix 1 outlines the special services available through the London (Canada) Board of Education.

Prior to the establishment of the Learning Resource System in London (Canada) in 1976, service to slower learners, those with mild learning disability, and those with reading difficulties was provided by an Education Clinic and an itinerant remedial staff. The remedial specialists worked with students in small groups, outside the classroom. Remedial assistance was designed to develop the skills and abilities required by the students to acquire competence in the basic skills, and was not usually directly related to the regular classroom work which, for students with learning problems, was usually too difficult. While effective in alleviating problems in basic skill areas, there were a number of drawbacks in the itinerant teacher model. Because the demand for remedial help usually exceeded the service available, students could not be seen by the remedial teachers as often or for as long as would be desirable. While remedial teachers attempted to maintain close contact with the students' classroom teachers, in fact, this was, in most cases, impossible to achieve due to time constraints. Without this communication, transfer of learning to the classroom situation was often minimal. Because of the number of staffs to which the remedial teachers related and because time in the school was relatively short, they were rarely perceived as part of the school staff and, as the 'visiting specialist' they found it difficult to establish the most desirable relationship in the school.

In many areas of North America there is growing dissatisfaction with traditional remedial methods which withdraw students from classrooms in order to provide small group instruction. First, in most cases, the student must fail before he is eligible for help, i.e. he is not referred until he has been unsuccessful in the classroom, with teaching methods used there. Second, while gains are often evident during the period that remedial instruction is provided, the achievements tend to dissipate when the assistance is discontinued. Third, while the students may show appreciable improvement in the small group, remedial situation, it is difficult to see a transfer of this learning to the classroom setting, unless remedial and classroom teachers work together very closely. Fourth, and probably most important, the provision of special instruction outside the regular classroom does not allow the classroom teacher to observe alternative strategies which might be incorporated into the regular classroom programs and thus eventually prevent the development of learning difficulties.

Emerging Philosophy

A number of current educational concerns, in addition to the specific ones outlined above, have influenced the development of the Learning Resource System. Four of the most apparent are: the cost of perpetuating a system which continuously provides additional remedial assistance, rather than attempting to reduce the number of students needing assistance by altering aspects of the basic classroom instruction; the trend to maintain as many students as possible in regular classroom settings; the recent emphasis on development and mastery of the basic cognitive skills, and the growing concern with accountability for program outcomes and for both program and economic efficiency.

The classroom teacher is the key to the ultimate success of any intervention and must retain responsibility for the students' progress. The basic, long-term goal, then, of the Learning Resource System is the enhancement of the classroom teacher's skill to manage basic instruction well and to deal with learning difficulties, as they develop, with the support of the learning resource teacher. It is acknowledged, nonetheless, that a number of students with specific learning disabilities will not learn basic skills in the regular classroom, and will need to be withdrawn for a period of time in order that concentrated work can be done with them.

For the learning resource teacher, a much broader role then that of remedial specialist is envisioned. The learning resource teacher is seen as a catalyst in the development of resource and materials, in the use of volunteers and tutors in the schools and in the exploration of new methods of service delivery and of instruction.

As the Learning Resource program develops, an attempt will be made to reach consensus on the priorities and boundaries of the program. In addition, continuing evaluation methods will be used to ensure that new approaches implemented are actually producing results and are as efficient as possible.

Development of Learning Resource System

During the 1975-76 school year plans were made to amalgamate three existing services, i.e., Education Clinic, Remedial Reading, and Learning Assist, and to develop a Learning Resource staff to provide service to all elementary schools, on a full-time or part-time basis. A committee worked to establish the basic rationale for the System and to write the Objectives and Job Descriptions. Objectives of the Learning Resource System emphasized three major areas: Development of basic cognitive skills (reading, spelling, mathematics, written work); Provision of enrichment; System delivery of curricula.

Staff selection was done by a committee and assignments were made, using the best available information regarding school needs.

During the spring of 1976 every opportunity was taken to make presentations on the Learning Resource System to concerned groups, i.e., Principals, Vice-Principals, Consultants, and school staffs.

From the early stages of planning, Dr. R. G. Stennett, Research Psychologist, was involved in the development of the Learning Resource System, and was asked to undertake a continuing formative and summative evaluation of the program. The initial formative evaluation has provided much useful information.

Organization and Staffing of Learning Resource System

Assignment of staff was based upon a formula developed and applied by Dr. Stennett. The Resource allocation formula is intended to ensure that the number of learning resource teachers assigned to the various schools is related directly to the schools' need for them. This formula is made up of seven factors, all of which represent various characteristics of the student population, i.e., number of children over-age for their grade, number of low achieving students, number of potential candidates for enrichment, number of slow learners, number of under-achievers, mobility or turnover of students during the school year, and a dimension made up of a series of special conditions such as large non-English speaking population, many one-parent families, etc., Various groups of educators, (principals, teachers, consultants, etc.), through surveys, determined the factors finally included in the formula and the weight or importance each one should have. The results of the formula were then adjusted in terms of a series of practical considerations and the Learning Resource Teachers assigned accordingly.

CURRENT LEARNING RESOURCE PROGRAM

Objectives

The major objective of the Learning Resource System is to enable pupils with learning difficulties which affect their acquisition of basic cognitive skills*, or pupils in need of enrichment, to receive immediate assistance in terms of revised teaching methodology and materials so that they may make appropriate progress in school .

*NOTE: In this context basic cognitive skills are defined as reading, mathematics, spelling, and written work

A second, and more long-term objective, is assistance in the delivery of new curricula and programs to the system.

Appendix 2 sets out the specific objectives of the program.

Services Provided 1976-77

Students can be helped either by receiving instructions directly from the Learning Resource teacher, or indirectly by advice or special materials provided to the classroom teacher or through volunteers or tutors who work with the students, under the supervision of the Learning Resource teacher. The following table outlines the services which were being provided in 1977 mid-May. It should be noted that any student who was not being served in May, i.e. who had received assistance earlier but no longer required help, was not counted in the survey. On the other hand, since some students could receive more than one kind of assistance, the figures tend to overestimate the number of different students being served.

Number and percent of services currently supplied to students by 42 Learning Resource Teachers, as of 1977 May 31.

Type of Service	N	%
A. Direct		
Individual	287	2.89
In small group	2310	23.25
In classes	1834	18.46
Total	4431	44.60
B. Indirect		
Providing advice/materials	4683	47.14
Through volunteers, tutors	820	8.25
Total	5503	55.40
Overall Total	*9934*	*100.0*

A substantial number (9 934) of services was provided by Learning Resource teachers, 55% of them by indirect methods and 45% by direct methods, primarily individual and small-group instruction. Of the students served, 58% were boys and 42% girls, with 53% of them from Primary grades, 40% from Junior, and 7% from the Intermediate level.

Reasons for referral for Learning Resource assistance are outlined below:

Number and percent of students who were referred to Learning Resource Teachers for various reasons.*

Reasons for Referral	N	% of All Students **
Student . . .		
- is part of a class which is receiving help	472	50.3
- is working below the level of the class in reading, mathematics, spelling or language	442	47.1
- has specific gaps in learning	223	23.8
- has a specific learning disability	87	9.3
- has a history of academic problems	76	8.1
- needed enrichment activities	73	7.8
- was new to the school and needed to adjust to the different program	48	5.1
- parents requested special help	45	4.8
- needs to learn English as a second language	28	3.0
- has been absent and consequently is behind in his work	14	1.5

*10% random sample of all students referred.
**Students could be referred for more than one reason.

Use of Teacher Time

In order to determine how Learning Resource Teachers used their time, and indirectly to estimate the service emphasis in the system, each Learning Resource teacher was asked to keep a diary for a typical day. The "average" Learning Resource teacher worked 8½ hours on a typical day and spent the great majority of the time (5¼ hours) providing remedial services and planning for a provision of those services (1¼ hours). Forty minutes were spent in various school activities (extra-curricular, hall duty, etc.) and about 20 minutes each on providing enrichment services, doing assessments and administrative tasks. About 10 minutes were required for travel. Five minutes or less were devoted to each of in-service training, program evaluation and curriculum activities.

The table below summarizes the data from the time-use survey.

Number and percent of time used in various direct and indirect remedial activities by 42 Learning Resource teachers during a 'typical' day.

Type of Activity	Number of Activities	% of Time Used
Direct remedial services to individuals, small groups, or classes	358	74.06
Consultation with classroom teachers	116	14.34
Assessments	29	7.21
Supervising volunteers, tutors	23	2.58
Team teaching	4	.97
Providing materials to classroom teachers	7	.82
TOTAL	537	99.98

BOUNDARIES OF LEARNING RESOURCE SYSTEM

A detailed survey dealing with program boundaries asked learning resource teachers to react to statements of appropriate and inappropriate resource activities, according to the Learning Resource System objectives. It was obvious that areas of disagreement existed, requiring clarification. The following policy guidelines were provided for the guidance of principals and learning resource teachers.

Basic Cognitive Skill Development

For the purpose of the London Learning Resource System, basic cognitive skills are defined as:

Reading - all aspects and sub-skills

Mathematics - all aspects and sub-skills

Spelling - all aspects

Written Work - Expression of thoughts and ideas in written form. Ability to write sentences, paragraphs, stories, to answer questions, to make outlines and summaries, to make notes, to write tests.

Basic Cognitive Skill Development: Direct Services

Assisting children with basic cognitive skill development in the areas of reading and phonics, mathematics, spelling, and written work is the fundamental mission of the Learning Resource System. This can be accomplished by working with children in or out of the classroom and individually, in small groups or classroom groups. It can involve team teaching.

The mandate of the Learning Resource System does NOT include:

a) cursive writing although Learning Resource teachers may provide teachers with appropriate materials;

b) gross motor skills;

c) listening skills, as distinct from the auditory training involved in reading instruction;

d) speech, although Learning Resource teachers may provide instruction in other areas (e.g. reading) to students with speech problems;

e) formal grammar;

f) physical education.

Children for whom English is a second language are appropriate candidates for Learning Resource System assistance under the supervision of the teachers of English as a Second Language.

Children enrolled in special classes, and who are, therefore, already receiving a special program, are NOT appropriate candidates for Learning Resource System assistance. However, learning resource teachers are expected to carry out assessment of candidates for special classes.

Children whose academic performance, while below average, is consistent with their abilities, are NOT suitable candidates for Learning Resource System assistance. Careful assessment is required to make this kind of judgment. In some cases slow learning children may be already overachieving.

Basic Cognitive Skill Development: Indirect Services

a) Service to teachers. Learning resource teachers may appropriately help teachers select materials for use with children having difficulty, teach demonstration lessons and provide in-service for other teachers.

Learning resource teachers should NOT be involved in helping primary teachers organize their reading groups; this is a role of the primary consultants.

Learning resource teachers' responsibility does NOT include dealing with classroom discipline problems. These matters should be referred to the school principal, vice-principal, guidance counsellor, or psychologist.

b) Volunteers. It is clearly 'within boundaries' for learning resource teachers to recruit and supervise the work of student or adult volunteer tutors. Volunteers serving other or non-instructional roles should be handled by others.

c) Consultation. Learning resource teachers may properly participate in school staff and team meetings and conduct interviews with the parents of students with whom the learning resource teacher is working.

Learning resource teachers may participate, at the principal's request, in parent interviews regarding special class placement for a student. The conduct of such interviews is the principal's responsibility.

Learning resource teachers may interpret the results of system-wide tests for their own use. Interpreting those test results to parents is more appropriately done by the classroom teacher, guidance counsellor or principal.

Enrichment Services

This entire area is currently under review. Specification of the goals and objectives of this service, the kinds of students to be served, and the methods of delivering the service required clarification before any more specific guidelines for learning resource teachers can be written.

Curriculum Development and Delivery

Learning resource teachers are expected to attend workshops on new curriculum, serve on curriculum development teams, and workshop classroom teachers on new or revised regular curricula.

Learning resource teachers are NOT expected to substitute for regular teachers who are being inserviced.

Assessment

Learning resource teachers may conduct diagnostic assessments on students referred to them and, if requested by their principal, administer standardized group tests during system-wide testing projects. Learning resource teachers may interpret the results of system-wide tests to classroom teachers to the extent that the learning resource teachers have had the training necessary to do so.

Requests for individual testing by the Measurement and Evaluation Service should be made by the principal or school team, rather than the learning resource teacher.

Identifying and Organizing Instructional Materials

A significant facet of the learning resource teachers' role consists of identifying, organizing and creating suitable instructional materials. Assisting teachers to become aware of and use such materials through staff meetings, idea boards, consultation or brief seminars is an integral part of this service. Learning resource teachers should try to become aware of all available instructional materials, including ETV.

Professional Development

Because of the demanding nature of the role learning resource teachers are expected to play, they are expected to participate actively in as many pertinent inservice activities as they can. In addition to system-sponsored inservice, learning resource teachers should take relevant Ministry or University courses whenever possible and do as much professional reading as they can.

Explaining the Learning Resource System

Learning resource teachers should use every appropriate informal or formal opportunity possible to explain the role and program of the learning resource system to faculty and parents.

Administrative Activities

Learning resource teachers may survey their school in the fall to locate potential candidates for service and develop and negotiate with the principal a plan of service for the coming year.

Learning resource teachers should NOT be expected to assist the principal with the preparation of statistical reports nor assume any of the principal's administrative duties during his absence.

If requested by the principal, learning resource teachers may prepare parental permission forms.

While learning resource teachers should not make notations on students' report cards, they may properly supply the classroom teacher with information she may want to include on the report card.

Program Evaluation

Learning resource teachers are expected to evaluate the impact of their own services and participate in system-level evaluations of the learning resource system. They are not expected to assist with the overall evaluation of the curriculum in their school(s).

Activities Not Directly Related to the Learning Resource System Program

Learning resource teachers may coach a school team if they wish.

If they are assigned to one school full-time, learning resource teachers may be expected to participate in the school's extra-curricular program and share in hall and yard duty.

Learning resource teachers should NOT be expected to: assist on class trips; provide 'crisis' assistance; supervise lunchrooms; counsel students re personal problems; or work as a substitute teacher when the regular classroom teacher is absent.

EVALUATION

The Learning Resource System has been under continuous formative and summative evaluation, under Dr. Stennett's direction. The references which appear in Appendix 5 indicate the studies which have been completed.

During 1977-78, the following evaluation projects are in progress:

Perceived In-Service Needs Survey
Pilot Study Using Goal Attainment Techniques
Intensive Resource Help Using Alternative Strategies
Resource Allocation Formula (updating)
Client Survey
Enrichment programming
Pilot Summative Evaluation Studies.

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LEARNING RESOURCE SYSTEM OBJECTIVES

The major objective of the Learning Resource System is to enable pupils with learning difficulties which affect their acquisition of basic cognitive skills*, or pupils in need of enrichment, to receive immediate assistance in terms of revised teaching methodology and materials so that they may make appropriate progress in school.

A second, and more long-term objective, is assistance in the delivery of new curricula and programs to the system.

NOTE* - In this context basic cognitive skills are defined as reading, mathematics, spelling, and written work.

Specific Objectives

A. Basic Cognitive Skills Development

1. To provide an academic assessment of pupils whose learning difficulties are affecting their acquisition of the basic cognitive skills.

2. To develop alternative programs in the basic cognitive skills area for individuals, small groups, and classroom groups.

3. To carry out programs in the basic cognitive skills areas with:

   individuals with severe learning difficulties
   small groups
   classroom groups

4. To assist pupils in the mastery of basic cognitive skills to a level which is consistent with their ability.

5. To develop instructional materials in the basic cognitive skills areas, for use in classrooms.

6. To cooperate with teachers in carrying out programs in basic cognitive skills areas, in classrooms.

7. To encourage and assist classroom teachers to adapt alternative demonstrated methods and materials to their classroom work.

8. To enlist the help of school and community voluntary assistants in carrying out programs of basic cognitive skills development.

B. Enrichment

1. To develop enrichment programs for selected pupils in need of further academic stimulation.

2. To carry out enrichment programs with individuals and groups of pupils.

3. To develop packages of enrichment activities for use in classrooms.

C. System Program Delivery

1. To work with leaders in subject areas in implementation of new curricula and programs in the school system.

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